



Department of Justice

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 30, 2009
WWW.USDOJ.GOV

CRT (202) 514-2007

TDD (202) 514-1888

JUSTICE DEPARTMENT FILES FAIR HOUSING LAWSUIT AGAINST COLUMBUS, INDIANA

WASHINGTON – The United States has filed a lawsuit against the city of Columbus, Ind., for violating the Fair Housing Act by refusing to grant a nonprofit organization a permit to operate a group home for 11 men recovering from drug and alcohol addiction, the Justice Department announced today. The lawsuit, filed in the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of Indiana, charges that the Columbus Board of Zoning Appeals refused a permit because of discriminatory attitudes toward recovering addicts among neighboring property owners.

“The Fair Housing Act guarantees individuals with disabilities the right to live in communities of their choice. We will continue to enforce the law vigorously to ensure the rights of persons with disabilities are protected,” said Loretta King, Acting Assistant Attorney General for the Justice Department's Civil Rights Division.

“We must make sure that local zoning actions further fair housing and don’t impede it,” said John Trasviña, HUD Assistant Secretary for Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity. “Individuals struggling to put their lives together shouldn’t have that effort derailed by unlawful discrimination.”

This lawsuit arose as a result of complaints filed with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) by Addiction Counseling Treatment Services, the agency that wanted to establish the group home, to be called Bethesda House. HUD referred the cases to the Justice Department after conducting an investigation.

The suit seeks a court order prohibiting future discrimination by the city and requiring the city to grant the requested permit, revise its procedures to assure fair treatment for future housing projects for people with disabilities, pay monetary damages to compensate victims and pay a civil penalty.

The federal Fair Housing Act prohibits discrimination in housing based on race, color, religion, national origin, sex, disability and familial status. More information about the Civil Rights Division and the laws it enforces is available at <http://www.usdoj.gov/crt> . Individuals who believe that they may have been victims of housing discrimination can call the Housing Discrimination Tip Line (1-800-896-7743), email the Justice Department at fairhousing@usdoj.gov , or contact the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development at 1-800-669-9777.

The complaint is an allegation of unlawful conduct. The allegations must still be proven in federal court.

###

09-1055